

## 1. The issue

In my thesis I examined how the political relations appeared in the 6th century in Gregory of Tours: *Libri decem Historiarum*, focusing on the relationship of two institutes, the kingship and the church. What was the function of kings and bishops in the society and in the kingdom, who was the ideal bishop and king, according to Gregory? What kind of conceptions influenced him in forming his views, and which of them represented his individual opinions?

After a short historiographical introduction, in the second chapter of my work the person and the work of Gregory are treated and his cultural, historical and geographical background are examined, where he lived and worked. Gregory of Tours was born in Clermont (a. 538.), and several of his relatives fulfilled important secular and ecclesiastical offices. He possessed the bishopric of Tours between 573-594 and he wrote his main hagiographical and historical works during this time as well. Gregory's *Historiae* is the single significant narrative source from this age. Apart from his work, I used acts of councils, lives of saints, fragmented historical and juridical sources, letters and the poems of Venantius Fortunat.

## 2. The geographical background: Gaul and the city of Tours

The territory of Gaul had not been unified from the point of view of the level of Romanization before the barbarian occupation: the regions north from the Loire almost entirely missed the influence of the Roman culture, except for some greater towns. The Romanization on the southern areas (Aquitaine, Auvergne) was greater than in the North. And, what's more, the city of Tours, where Gregory lived, was on the border of these two regions. Parallel with the deterioration of the structures of the Roman Empire the local senatorial and *curialis* aristocracy had fulfilled the local offices, quiet independently from the central authority. The arrival of the Franks from the 4th century onward only the process of the separation of Gaul from the Roman Empire strengthened. The local aristocracy found his success mostly in the ecclesiastical career, and with the influence of the vacuum in the power, the bishops received many secular affairs, too. Since the centre of the secular and

ecclesiastical administration were the towns, the importance of the cities got more appreciated, and this situation was not changed by the establishments of the barbarian kingdoms.

In the *Historia* as well, the main stage of the events are the cities. Gregory's information was limited geographically, primarily he had knowledge about his mother-city and where he fulfilled his bishopric, still, this is not the main reason why the saints of Tours and Clermont got the main role. The most important target for Gregory of Clermont like a bishop of Tours was to represent the authority of his own churches.

Apart from this, it is not Tours that is the most frequently mentioned in the *Historia* in a political sense. In certain cases, he does not speak about the political events concerning Tours at all. We know only indirectly when Tours belonged to which ruler, and only in cases, when struggles preceded the invasion of the town. Consequently, Gregory does not politically place the city of Tours in the life of the Merovingian kingdoms. The city of Tours is important not from a political, but an ecclesiastical point of view, like the centre of a cult of a saint. The propagation of the cult of saints belonged to the increasing of the authority of the church, because the saints were representatives of the church, who could be put as an example before every member of the society, and who were the proof that the power of God shows through his saints and the church is much more powerful than the earthly rulers. Accordingly, the cult of the saints serves to parallel the power of the heaven with that of the earth, the authority of the church with that of the kings. Of course, Gregory thinks about the local leadership, not about the church extending to the whole world. The role of Tours appeared indirectly, through the person of Saint Martin in the *Historia*, who was a bishop of Tours between 371-397.

### **3. Gregory's social background and his literacy**

Gregory came from a noble family of Auvergne, the members of which fulfilled secular and ecclesiastical posts, among them, episcopal offices, and among his ancestors we find Vetius Apagatus, a martyr from the 2nd century. Being an orphan, Gregory was brought up and educated by his relatives in the Christian culture and religion, and besides, he might have learnt classical literature. Although he claims many times that he did not learn *grammatica*, it probably means that he did not learnt Greek (pagan) literature. He speaks about his lack of education at other times, too, which is probably a modest attitude, a literal topos, because his hints do not suggest this.

However, the language of Gregory's work is very far from the classical Latin, and because of this he received a lot of criticism from the posterity. But Gregory had a very conscious concept behind the choice of a simple and common style. Although we have works even from the 6th century which are worthy of linguistically the classical ancestors, at the same time a style developed whose main character was the simplicity and severity and while followed the common discourse in its use of words and in its structures. The first representative of this style in Gaul was Caesarius of Arles, but its perfection was achieved by Gregory of Tours.

Gregory followed the principle determined by Jerome and Augustine for the Christian writers, which was thought to be followed even by the pope Gregory the Great. For them, the most important thing was to be understood by everybody. This kind of style is the *sermo humilis* or *sermo piscatoris*.

#### **4. The *Historia Francorum***

The work of Gregory of Tours used to be mentioned as *The History of the Franks*, meaning that this is one of the works which tell about the history, customs and institutions of a nation. However, Gregory's work is not an ethnohistoriography in the strict sense of the word: for him, the Franks and Gallo-Romans are equally the members of the Christian society. Gregory does not identify the Franks as barbarians, because the Frankish kings acted as the defenders of Catholicism, while the barbarians were the enemies of the saints and of the church, who disturbed the peace of the Christian society.

Apart from the definition of the title, it is well worth seeing which genre the work belongs to. Gregory names his work as *historiae* in the sense of the determination of Herodotos, according to which *historia* is the kind of historiography where the author writes about events which he saw with his own eyes. Gregory leant on written sources (Eusebios, Jerome, Orosius, Victorius, letters from the age, Byzantine sources), oral discourse, traditions and at last but not least, on his own experiences. He does not simply uses them, but organises them according to his own concept.

Gregory's aim was not to simply treat each single battle, war, diplomatical mission, council, tax-order, famine and revolt, but to present the struggle of Christian society helped by the saints against human vices, heresy and Evil. Besides, his aim was to present the central role of each bishopry and episcopal family, among them that of his own family. From this aspect it is more important to show what kind of miracles happen at the tomb of a saint, to

transmit the lives and faith of saints, or to present an example to be followed or not through individual characters. The hagiographical *excursus* are not only as important as the historical events, actually they are more important.

## **5. The bishops in the *Historia***

In this chapter, I examined the presentation of the bishops in the *Historia* and in a 6th century-society as described by Gregory's work. The duties of the bishops defined by the *Historia* and by the acts of councils are very multifold: to govern the church, to lead the believers spiritually, to protect the goods and doctrines of the church, to do caritative actions, to represent and defend Christians e. g. against injustice, siege and epidemics. All of these duties remained at the local level, but, of course some of the ecclesiastical duties, like creating canons and keeping in touch with the diocesis, electing the bishops and treating liturgical and doctrinal questions, the bishops left their provinces, and they gave testament for the universality of the church. Besides, most of the bishops got a role as members or leaders of a diplomatic mission, counsellors of the king, assistance in juridical and administrative affairs.

Gregory regards the Christian society of his age as one which is lead by the kings and bishops together, according to the model of the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, the role of the prophets is to mediate the will of God toward the rulers and to show them the right way. But, in the field of secular power, they did not require any authority for themselves, they did not take sides in the questions of taxes, administration, apart from that cases, when these gained some sacral meaning in the given circumstances.

However, according to Gregory's work and the other sources of the age, it is clear that the bishops of the Merovingian age had more influence than the ancient prophets in secular affairs. The cause of it must have been the totally different historical situation, that is, on the one hand, the majority of the bishops came from the old senatorial aristocracy and the *curialis* families, and on the other hand, the church kept the administrative frames of the falling Roman Empire, and because of this, the new dynasties found efficient supporters in them. The political role of the bishop, however, decreased gradually as the barbarian kingdoms strengthened, when the new secular officers were able to provide the duties of administration. The functions of the bishops, on a higher level of politics, was limited mainly to represent their city, to defend their faithful folk against the power of the king and the secular officers. This was a difficult task, because the tools of the bishops were quiet exiguous. The author of the *Historia* might have assigned such a huge significance to the character of kings and

bishops, because in a lot of cases the success and influence of somebody depended on the individuum.

Besides, it was required from the bishops to create unity (*consensus et concordia*) inside the population of the city, because, as in the kingdom, discrepancy created civil wars and perditions, just as the divisions inside the town created killings. The attempts for the converting of the Jews (LDH V, 11.) must be interpreted from this point of view, because Jewish people attained many times the aggression of Christian people – possibly because of some mob-psychosis – and the church thought that these conflicts would stop with the creation of religious unity. This attempt is similar – although on a smaller scale and on a local level – to the idea represented by the Christian church, who, when threatened by the heretics, maintained the unity of the saints (*communio sanctorum*) thus wanting to reconstitute the integrity of the church..

Furthermore, an other important duty of a bishop was to attend the cult of the saints in the town, on the one hand, by the *adventus*, and on the other hand, by other ceremonies and feats to propagate the cult, during which they kept themselves to the previous traditions of the city, and they amplified the cult with new ceremonies as well. It was necessary for governing the souls of the believers and for strengthening the political situation of the church against the central leadership (the ruler and his officers).

As for the duties required from the saints *patroni* (protecting the city and the church), these concurred with the requirements expected from the bishops by their believers. The reason why the cult of the saint bishops was maintained to preserve their memory - strengthening the living bishops' position as well - but to reflect on the real social and political obligations of the living bishops. Not only the church, but the secular society as well demanded the maintenance of the cult. The bishops of the 6th century impersonated an active model of a saint in a sense of religion and politics. They had to become a *patronus*, and similarly they undertook asceticism and turning away from the world.

The priesthood of the city of Tours attended to advance the cult of Saint Martin already from the beginning of the 5th century, the tool of which was extended construction. Inside the city, the town of Saint Martin, the *Martinopolis* was gradually built. The most important person in the *Historia* is Saint Martin, but not because this could confirm the political position of Tours, but because he was a *patronus* saint. It is not only the sainthood of Martin that is a priority for Gregory, but generally that of the saints of the church who fulfilled some protecting duty over a city, a community or settlement. The saints' protection

maintains the church as a divine being, while the royalty could not produce any explicit royal saint *patronus* in Gregory's work.

The role of the patron saints is so important, because most of them were bishops on the earth, and after their death they kept doing the same duty: they help the community with their intercession. As if this meant, that the bishop's function and his power over his believers did not disappear after his death. However, in the case of the rulers, this kind of thought cannot be found in the *Historia*, their ruling is temporary, and if they merited the eternal life by their life and acts, they cannot interfere in worldly matters any longer.

## **6. The kings in the *Historia***

The personality of the kings of the *Historia* are varied enough. The most evil person is Chilperich, who was a contemporary of Gregory. According to the author, the king inhibited the work of the church, confined her freedom, he did not listen to the bishops, he was cruel toward the subjects, greedy and thirsty of power, fought constantly with his brothers. Facing him, there is the person of Gonthran, who is his contrast in almost everything: he had good relationship with the bishops of the church, he was clement-hearted and a giver. But the character of Gonthran is not as coherent as Chilperich's, because Gregory does not conceal his negative features. In the *Historia*, King Clovis is the model-king who has to be followed by his contemporaries and his successors, because he was the one who accepted catholic Christianity, established the bases of the church, and after gaining single rule, he fought with the heretic nations. On the other hand, however, Gregory does not conceal that Clovis was a rather cruel ruler.

Gregory's relationship toward the Merovingian dynasty was not directly hostile, he did not reject secular authority, because he knew that the activities of the kings were necessary for the navigation of the earthly life. His portrayals are not exempt from subjectivity, but it is not due to his naivety, on the contrary: behind his characterizings, there is a very conscious conception.

Gregory's concepts about the kings was little affected by the German idea – if there was one – of the bellicose leader. The territorial expansion of a kingdom was accepted by the bishop-writer Gregory – he probably conveyed the opinion of his church – if it was verified by the extension of Christianity. He is disinterested in the aspirations of the rulers to own as much territory as possible because of economy and supremacy. Gregory saw the conqueror campaigns meaningless (like the Italian campaigns supported by the Byzantine emperors,

which were not successful and lead to the devastation of the army) and considered them meaningless massacre (e.g. the civil wars between the cities), or viewed them as converting campaigns. He saw the kings' campaigns to Hispania reasonable, because they were against the heretic Visigothic kings, that is against heresy. Likewise, he does not write about the kings' lawgiving and administrative activities, and he sees in taxing not an economical but a moral cause: human greed.

## **7. Relationship between kings and bishops**

It can easily be seen which are the events, during which the author confronts the functions of the kings and bishops. The bishop defends the population of the city from catastrophes – consequently, he condemns every step which leads to civil war, perdition, killing and devastation. The bishop's duty is to support and provide the poor, the sick, the widows and the orphans – accordingly, he protests immensely, when the rulers want to tax the church and to curtail her lands and property, from which the bishop can finance the paupers. The main duty of the bishop is to secure the spiritual salvation of the believers – but for this, the support of the doctrines of the church by the kings is necessary. Furthermore, the bishop's duty is to propagate the presence and mediation of the saint, who defends the settlement – which requires that the rulers should respect the integrity of the city.

The role of the church in the society had changed by the 6th century: a new and strong leadership began to come about which, gradually, produced his own governing body, not from the churchmen only, or the exsenatorial (rather *curialis*) aristocracy, because of which Gregory regards one of the bishops' duties to not let the authority of the church in the new society decrease. It is not by accident that Gregory maintains so much the significance of the old senatorial (*curialis*) aristocracy, which principally carried the Christian and antique values in itself. The bishops' duties which existed in the age of the Empire, got fewer or landed on another level: the function of the *defensor* changed not to a military, but to a social one, the function of administering justice was no more a question of institution but rather a question of authority. However, the importance of the educational and caritativ function of the bishops still remained important.

For fulfilling all these duties, the bishops needed the help of the secular authority. Consequently, the question for Gregory is not secular or ecclesiastical leadership, but whether the secular ruler fulfils his duty based on the ecclesiastical, more exactly Christian ethics, thus

the author puts the image of the *good shepherd* as an example before the bishops and the kings. According to this, it would be improper to see, that Gregory opposes the power of bishop and church with that of the king and world. The situation is more complicated, not only in the *Historia*, but more likely in reality as well. Gregory would have liked to see kings on the throne, who partly fulfilled the duties of the bishops, but not instead of them, not in the office of them, but in the fields where the bishops' authority did not extend. The bishop is the representative of the local authority, of the faithful population of the city, while the king impersonates the central leadership. Besides, bishops and kings have to collaborate: for this reason, among the functions of the king, there are the sustenance of peace, the defence of the population, the perseverance of the doctrines, the support of the church, while the duty of the church is the preservation of the faith and ethics, and the advising of the rulers.

One of the most important issues of the *Historia* is the criticism of the moral status of the age, that is certified by the many hagiographical excursions. In Gregory's opinion, the epidemics and prodigies, the civil wars, devastations and killings are the signs of the moral decadence. His criticism of the evil kings and bishops is primarily connected not with their life style or cruelty, but their relationship to the ecclesiastical power. He was worried because of the decay of the kingship, because it meant a decay in morals, which ensues from the political oppositions, because of which the king curtails the power of the church, and so the church loses her influence over the control of ethics. The moral conflict deepens, if a king does not listen to his bishops. The kings had inevitably to confront the church, that was a state in the state, and its bishops had so much authority and influence because of historical and cultural traditions, that it made the kings jealous. The rulers, besides their influence over society, would have liked to extend their potency over the property of the church, and as a matter of fact, this was the reason of the attempts to assure their control on the *episcopatus*, *ducatus* and the *comitatus*.

However, the representation of the real social, political and economical oppositions in the *Historia* is not an antagonistic contrast, but a moral conflict that has its roots in the activity of the persons of different functions. The royal authority is not sacral in itself, but not a negative power either. It can be used for the sake of the people and can be abused as well. The *Historia* is pervaded by the parallels between the good and evil royal features and actions.

Talking about moral conflicts, it can not be neglected to observe that Gregory in more cases compares the age of Clovis with that of his grandsons. It can be said, that this is one of



the main issues of the work. He gives many examples about King Clovis, who fought victorious battles, but not civil ones, who left a flourishing kingdom for his successors, but did not heaped useless treasures. Gregory's main accusation against his contemporary rulers are the greediness, desiring the property of the church, the cruelty and the condemnation of the ecclesiastical officers. All of these accusations are shown mainly from the point of view of the church, and this, the king's relation to the church, is the real measure of their characters.

From among the rulers, Clovis and Gontran are the ones, who may have the episcopal virtue of creation of unity. Clovis created this unity by converting his people to the Christian faith, and Gontran did it by attempting peaceful solutions instead of civil wars (although he was not absolutely successful). The meaning of the first chapter of the VIII. book, where the king entering Orléans was welcome by the whole community (Christians, Jews, Syrians) with adoration, is that the person of the king is able to create the unity. Of course, all of this do not mean, that Gregory saw the king as a bishop. Both of them have their own duty in the society, but both of them have to follow the orders of Christianity.

The role of Saint Martin of Tours in the *Historia* does not only serve to maintain the political significance of Tours, but, in wider sense, to generally propagate the eternity and continuity of the church, and it contrasts the temporary and final character of earthly authority. In the end of his work, Gregory enumerates his bishop-ancestors, indicating that the dynasty of the bishops is stronger than that of the kings who have uncertain power, and most of who were precipitated from their thrones and died before their time, while most of the bishops fulfilled their office until the end of their lives. That is, the power of the church and bishops is more imperishable even on the earth like that of the kings.

On the other hand, Saint Martin is the example to be followed for everybody, among them for the bishops and the kings to live the right Christian life. This way of life was not based on the idea of martyrism, as in the previous centuries. More exactly, it was not necessary to shed blood for being a martyr, it was enough, if the believer affronted the temptations of the world, and followed the orders of Christianity. However, the duties of the bishops and the rulers were much more, because they had responsibility not only for themselves, but for their people as well. In Gregory's work, sometimes episcopal virtues are spoken about that are expected of the rulers, too. Both have to work to create peace, to nourish the poor, orphans and the sick, to take measures against injustice, and to defend their people. But what is the church's duty is to lead the people to salvation, and finally, the kings'

duty is to secure the background for the work of the bishops, and to do everything to increase the authority of faith and the church.

## **Publications**

1. Tours-i Gergely: Korának története 10 könyvben. Bevezetés és fordítás (Gregory of Tours: Libri decem Historiarum. Hungarian translation with critical notes and introduction). Bp., L'Harmattan. Megjelenés alatt.
2. A Meroving-kor eseményei Tours-i Gergely: A frankok története című művében (The Events of the Merovingian Age in Gregory of Tours: The History of Franks). Antik Tanulmányok, XLVI (2002) 259-267.
3. Püspöki hatalom Galliában a 6. század második felében. Az egyházi társadalom Tours-i Gergely leírásában. (Bishopric Power in Gaul in the 2nd Half of the 6th Century. The Ecclesiastical Society as Described by Gregory of Tours). Sic Itur ad Astra, 2002/4. 23-49.
4. Jewish Communities in the Merovingian Towns in the 2nd Half of the 6th Century as Described by Gregory of Tours. Chronica. Vol. 5 (2005) 15-25.

## **Conference papers**

1. Az antik kultúra hatása Tours-i Gergely történeti munkájában (The Influences of Roman Culture in the Historical Work of Gregory of Tours.). In: V. Magyar Ókortudományi Konferencia, 2002. május 23-25. Piliscsaba
2. Jews in Early Medieval Towns as Described by Gregory of Tours. In: Segregation, Integration and Assimilation in Medieval Towns – konferencia, Budapest, 2003. február 20-22. Budapest
3. Children and Power in the Sixth-Century Merovingian Gaul. In: Youth and Age. International Medieval Congress. 11-14. July 2005. Leeds